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THE FUTURE OF EAST TIMOR

The Social and Political Problems of East Timorese Before and After Integration *)

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I. Introduction

1. East Timor is entering its 15th year as a province of Indonesia. It is the youngest province and is still in a period of **transition** from the previous era of Portuguese colonialism to an era of independence. In contrast to other regions of Indonesia, the process of decolonisation in East Timor, which was very belated, was only finally achieved through bloodshed, which has left traumatic scars, the effects of which have been difficult to erase in the short term.

2. This traumatic condition which arose from the transition period from being a colonised to an independent community and which has been taking place along side the need for economic development, has given rise to a dilemma. On the one hand, the community needs **freedom** in all aspects of life, but on the other hand, the government has to work hard to **protect** those socio-economic groups which are very weak. Thus economic development,which requires greater private sector freedom (through deregulation) to permit the business sector to be more entrepreneurial, has to be compromised through **regulation** or intervention by the regional administration in a variety of economic activities. This intervention, in turn, can "kill off" or stimy community initiative.

3. The Church which is the "patron" of the East Timorese people, faces an even greater dilemma because **first** it has to remain firm in standing between the government and the people, whilst at the same time remaining "allied" to the interests of the people, and **secondly** it has to be capable of effectively marrying spiritual and material development.

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II. The Economic Conditions of The Local People

4. There is no disputing that the majority of East Timorese still live in a state of poverty with a per capita income of less than Rp 180,000 per year or less than Rp 493 per day. The status of health and nutrition is poor, such that the people's aspirations in life remain very low. This low level of aspirations greatly complicates efforts aimed toward achieving economic development.

5. The period of unrest which accompanied the process of East Timor's political integration into Indonesia, has brought about **uncertainty** regarding land ownership rights and rights to utilise land, as well as a decline in farm livestock populations and supply shortages of agricultural inputs.

6. The traditional agricultural system with its very low levels of productivity is difficult to change because of its close relationship to accentuated ethnic differences, and the concentration of land and livestock ownership, in addition to land fragmentation.

7 .Efforts aimed at enhancing community welfare still face obstacles arising from such socio-traditional practices as feasts where, for example, very substantial numbers of farm stock are slaughtered. Efforts to reduce the numbers of such traditional ceremonies by applying large fines do not appear to have yielded positive results. It appears that education, which requires a long period of time, constitutes the one process and method which can effectively overcome these practices.

8. In the field of economic activities, a sufficiently complex problem concerns the relationship between, and the imbalanced economic competitiveness of, the indigenous East Timorese peoples and the migrant populations, which include people of Chinese descent as well as small-scalle traders from Sulawesi (Buginese, Butonese and Macassarese). The inequality in trade competitiveness between the two groups is of considerable concern and requires effective handling from a socio-cultural perspective.

9. Cultivating and trading coffee in East Timor is one activity which dominates the lives of the common people. Coffee, as the major agricultural export commodity, with exports exceeding 10,000 tonnes annually constitutes the backbone of East Timor's economy. Because of that, it is most important that policies concerning production and merchandising be correct and integrated. The move away from the monopolistic marketing system, a hangover from the period of unrest, to a system which is free from monopolistic control is expected to create an attractive business climate for all sides.

10. One potential problem of significant concern is unemployment among educated youth, the numbers of which have increased rapidly since integration. Overcoming this unemployment problem will require well targeted and comprehensive labour market planning covering the government sector as well as the commercial sector outside the government.

III. Social and Political Problems

11. In spite of the presence of military forces which are still very important as a guarantee against threats to disturb law and order, the social and political problems related to the integration can be considered resolved. This means that the existence in East Timor of ABRI (Armed Forces) personnel in relatively large numbers ought not be equated with any notion that security has not yet been restored in East Timor.
    The disbanding of **KOSKAM** (Security Operations Command) effective from the begining of December 1989 constitutes one clear step signalling the removal of the "war situation", and the end of the **dualism** in government administration.

12. With the removal of the duality in government administration from the region, the Governor and the provincial administration can have greater scope to initiate development programs, be these programs in the socio-political or socio-economic fields, and with particular regards to rural development. In the area of rural development for example, the provincial administration needs to be given full authority to form village administrations which trully accord with the customs and the brotherly oriented nature of the village people themselves. For example the formation of Village Consultative Institutes (LMD) and the Village Community Resilience Institutes (LKMD) as set out under Act No. 5 of 1979, and which have been considered more appropriate for the Javanese village structures, and less appropriate for the majority of village communities outside Java, need to be "modified" so that they accord with the situation and conditions of the East Timorese Community.

13. Potentially, youth and women have a very important role to play in "shaping" the new community of East Timor. Women in reality already play a major economic and social role in the family. Youth on the other hand, are quickly developing into an educated group very well aware of their role in a variety of economic, social, and political aspects of life. Therefore in order to give shape and purpose to this youth group, they very much need to have freedom and the opportunity to organise into groups in accordance with their wishes and aspirations.

14. The military authorities which now work together with the **Church** need very much to "get close to" youth and women's groups in the spirit of **mbangun karsa** and **tut wuri handayani** (to stimulate initiative and to lead from behind). In addition to that, youth and women have to be aware of the people's aspirations and base all their activities only upon advancing the lives of the people, including in the political, economic and social spheres.

15. Traditional community leaders need to be "embraced" and at the same time developed along such lines that their socio-political and socio-economic role is increasingly firm. The new community of East Timor can not possibly develop quickly, let alone harmoniously, if the developing systems and patterns of administration are not autonomous (mandiri) in nature. This means autonomy must develop at the provincial, municipal and village levels.

IV. The Church and the Community

16. The Catholic Church in East Timor, with its Portuguese traditions, must work hard to "serve" its congregation which has been growing rapidly since integration. The problems faced by the Church are to spread its teachings but without "clashing" with indigenous custom/ traditions.

17. In its relations with the provincial administration, the role of the Church is clear, that is to achieve a balance between the community's **spiritual** and **material** needs. The Church is uniquely placed to work together with the provincial administration in raising the aspirations and levels of participation by the community in economic development. The poverty which still characterises the lives of the majority of East Timorese can only be reduced/attacked through integrated policies and programs involving all government agencies, the Church and the NGO's.

18. Cooperation between the Church and the military/security authorities can be characterised as one of mutual assistance. The military in its **dual function** role also needs to blend its tasks in security and community welfare. Consultation and communication need to continually developed to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the joint efforts aimed at advancing the village communities.

V. Conclusions

19. Development of the village communities in East Timor will continue to proceed at a slow pace and will continue to face complex obstacles. The obstacles and inhibitors of development are not only **internal** in nature (that is

from within the community itself), but also appear from outside (externalities) as a side effect of the process of integration.

20. It will be impossible to accelerate the process of economic development of the East Timorese community without at the same time overcoming the obstacles presented by these internal and external factors. Solving the internal problems requires an integrated multi-field and multi-sector approach, whilst, for the external factors to be addressed, will require a determinated effort from the provincial administration through tight coordination between the provincial administration, the Church, and the military authorities.

21. The future of the East Timorese community will be very promising if these problems can be handled quickly and effectively. The role of the government in advancing economic and physical development is indeed substantial. Yet in the long term it will be the community itself which will play a more determining role, both in developing its **resilience**, as well as its **desire** and **capability** to catch up the level of development reached by fellow provinces elsewhere in Indonesia.